



**SENATOR**

**Mary Margaret Haugen**

E-Newsletter - 10th District

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**10th Legislative District**

**February 27, 2009**

### **2009 LEGISLATURE — WEEK SEVEN**

This week we passed one of the more stressful dates on the legislative calendar. Wednesday was the last day on which bills could be moved out of the respective policy committees in which they were introduced. The exceptions to this rule are the Senate Transportation and Ways & Means committees and House fiscal committees (their deadline is this Monday). With the previous exceptions noted, and except for bills necessary to implement the budget, or already in the Rules Committee, only bills that have passed out of committee can be considered from here out; all other bills must wait until the next legislative session to be heard.

This made for a tense week as we scrambled to make sure the bills considered most important cleared the hurdle.

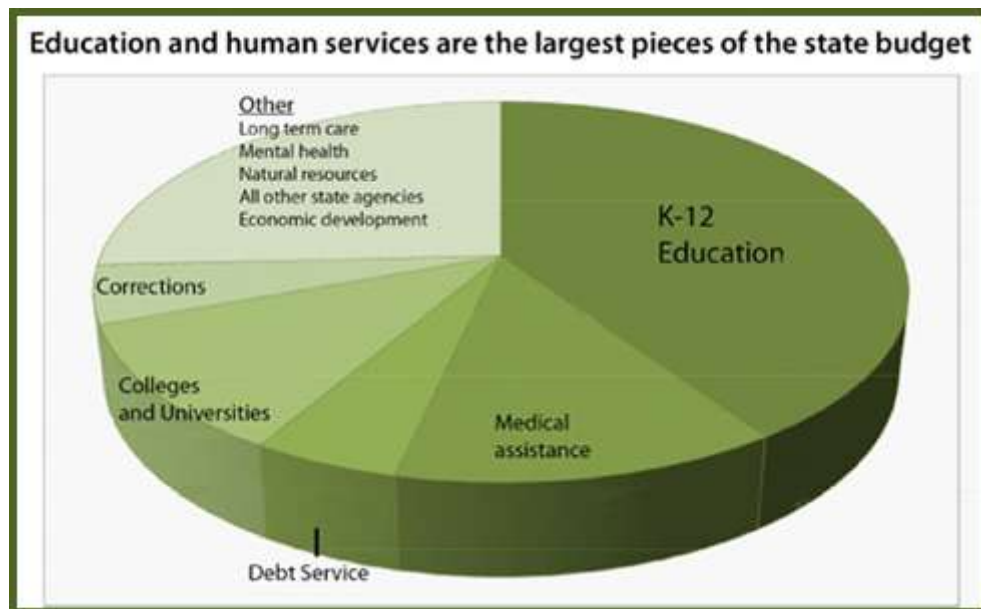
The next major date to watch for is March 12, which is the last day to vote on bills in their chamber of origin. This is when any Senate bills must pass out of the Senate in order to be considered by the House, and vice versa. With very few exceptions, those bills that aren't passed out of their respective chambers are no longer under consideration.

### **THE REALITY OF OUR BUDGET SITUATION**

There's no sugar-coating it. Washington is facing the most dramatic budget shortfall in nearly 30 years, brought on by the national recession. One thing is certain: while there are critical areas of the state budget that are off limits because of the state constitution, almost everything the state does to help people get back on their feet, take care of our elderly and protect our communities will be deeply affected.

Right now, along with almost every other state, we are facing a budget shortfall in the billions – \$8.5 billion currently, which translates to nearly a quarter of the overall state operating budget.

The catch is that more than half of the state budget consists of items like basic education, medical assistance and debt service that are constitutionally-mandated – with these items off limits from cuts, we need to trim nearly half of everything that's left.



Some people think that we can solve the budget problem if we simply “freeze spending” at current levels - but think what that would really involve.

Can we really stop any more children to from enter our public schools?

Can we stop arresting criminals and sending them to prison?

Can we pass a law that requires every company that the state does business with to not raise their prices?

Balancing the budget will require some tough choices, but we need to be realistic about what those choices are. I’m hearing from plenty of people all over our community, and I appreciate the comments and suggestions that they are providing.

### **ECONOMIC RECOVERY WEBSITE**

Did you know there’s a new website where you can track information about how the federal economic recovery plan is being implemented in our state?

The updated website at <http://www.recovery.wa.gov> will emphasize accountability and transparency of how economic stimulus dollars are being spent, including:

- ✍ A link to sources of money and contact information that local governments can use to find out how to apply for funds
- ✍ Links to state agency websites that contain more information about agency recovery efforts
- ✍ Links to federal websites, including the primary federal site, [www.recovery.gov](http://www.recovery.gov), that provide details about the plan
- ✍ Information for the public on what projects have been approved and the results of those projects
- ✍ A place for state agencies to apply to have the projects they have approved certified by the Governor
- ✍ Forms for agencies to use to provide reports required by the federal government
- ✍ Application deadlines for various sources of money

We're hoping that this website will provide a place for Washingtonians to see where the recovery money is going and the results that are being produced – check it out!

### **WASHINGTON'S TRANSPORTATION SHARE OF THE FEDERAL STIMULUS**

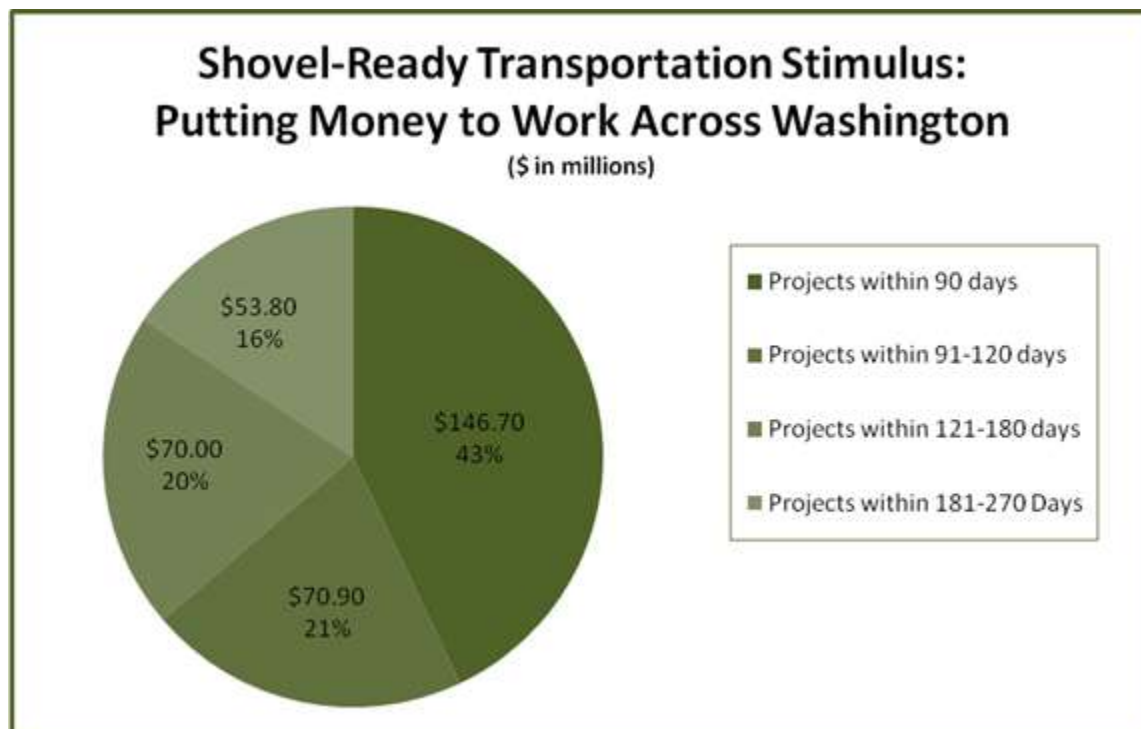
Although we face a serious shortfall of revenue, the Senate is committed to improving transportation using dedicated revenue sources like gas taxes and federal funds that are constitutionally restricted from being used to balance the general budget.

In fact, our state is already set to begin \$4.1 billion in highway construction and preservation projects during the next two years that was budgeted in previous years, and now we're also set to receive a total of \$492 million in Federal Stimulus Highway Funds as part of the American Recovery & Investment Act.

About 30 percent of these funds (\$155 million) go directly to local and regional transportation projects, with the remaining \$344 million allocated for state projects.

Part of my job as the chair of the Senate Transportation Committee involves making tough decisions about how to allocate limited resources, and I participated in a bipartisan process with my colleagues in selecting 35 projects from around Washington that met the criteria for the state portion transportation stimulus funding.

This money is part of President Obama's "stimulus program" that is specifically dedicated to improving highways and creating jobs quickly. In fact, one of the strings attached to this federal funding is that half of the state allocation (\$174M) must be spent on projects that can start work within 120 days, and the remaining state and entire local allocation (\$148 million) must be obligated within 1 year.



This "shovel ready" requirement is intended to put people to work quickly, but there isn't enough money available for every shovel-ready project in the state.

In order to make the most effective use of these funds, we used a strict set of criteria to decide which highway projects would receive money as part of this stimulus package, including:

- ✍ Highway safety enhancements
- ✍ Improvements that have a regional or statewide impact
- ✍ Projects that can advance existing project commitments

Of course, some are unhappy over local projects in their community that didn't make the list.

However, it is important to note the fact that the federal stimulus already includes funds that go straight to local communities for transportation projects, including:

- ✍ **\$97 million** to transportation management areas, metropolitan planning organizations and counties.
- ✍ **\$54 million** directly to local jurisdictions with fewer than 200,000 people.
- ✍ **More than \$18.5 billion** is available in federal grants.

The good news is that we're ignoring politics and putting this money to use on projects that can get people to work fast on highway maintenance and construction projects that improve safety.

An interactive map of the projects funded with federal stimulus funds is available [here](#).

There is also information on how the Washington State Department of Transportation is proceeding with these projects on their web site [here](#), and a complete list of state highway transportation projects [here](#).

### **RURAL TRANSIT STOPS GET SENATE APPROVAL**

Today the Senate approved my proposal to allow rural transit providers to make stops at unmarked locations!

I've introduced [Senate Bill 5180](#) to formalize the practice that most rural public transit vehicles already do — stopping at unmarked areas to pick up or drop off riders when it's safe. I think this is a great “do something, cost nothing” idea that can make life better for plenty of people in our community and all over our state.

I'd like to thank Martha Rose, the Executive Director of Island Transit and Bob Clay, Island Transit Board Chairman and Town Council Member from Coupeville, for their help in testifying before the Senate Transportation Committee. You can see the video online at <http://blog.senatedemocrats.wa.gov/haugen/helping-rural-transit-help-you/>.

Senate Bill 5180 now goes to the House Transportation Committee for their consideration.



### **THIS WEEK'S SPECIAL VISITOR**

This week I once again had the privilege seeing an outstanding local student from our area serve in the Senate Page Program. This young man was honored to have been officially sponsored by Senator Lisa Brown, our Senate Majority Leader, as I had already filled my page allotment for the session. I was so pleased to have the opportunity to meet him and see him carry the United States Flag into the Senate Chambers this morning.

Connor Martin is a 15-year old 9th grade student at Stanwood High School. He enjoys baseball, snowboarding, and travelling with his family in the U.S. and Europe. Thank you Connor for serving as a Senate Page!

### **WE'RE HERE TO HELP**

My executive assistant Nova Gattman, legislative assistant Gina Bull and intern Beau Perschbacher are available to provide constituent services to the people of our community, so please feel free to contact us with questions or concerns—whether they involve bills before the Legislature or topics you feel are being overlooked.

You can reach me by [e-mail](#) or call my office in Olympia at **360-786-7618**. If you have a concern, I want to hear it.

In the meantime, please visit my [web page](#) for up-to-date info on what's happening at the Legislature. I post regular updates — including video — onto my blog, and it's far more information than we'd want to put into a weekly update like this.

Until next week — Take Care!

Thank you for reading my email newsletter. I appreciate your interest in the legislative process. If at any time you decide you no longer wish to receive updates from me, please go to <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/subscriptions/member.aspx?member=haugenm> to remove your name from the list.

**Washington Senate Democratic Caucus**